

RESTORING FAMILY TIES: What's Really Happening in 2006? (How Churches of Christ and Christian Churches Are Serving God Together in the 21st Century)

Part II of a paper presented at the 63rd Annual Bible Lectures,
Pepperdine University, Malibu, California, May 2-5, 2006

Presented by Victor Knowles
Editor, *One Body*; President, Peace on Earth Ministries

THE YEAR 2006 is a significant year in the history of the American Restoration Movement. It marks the one hundredth anniversary of the division noted in the U. S. Census of Religious Bodies (1906), that made an official distinction between Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. (The "independent" Christian Churches/Churches of Christ did not emerge until 1927.) 2006 is not a year of celebration but it should be a year of recognition, reflection, and resolve.

Following the rigors of the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Sand Creek Declaration, and the Census report, Churches of Christ went their separate ways. Earl Irvin West noted, "... by 1906, the work of division had taken its full course. The 'Christian Churches' or 'Disciples of Christ,' as they preferred to be called, took their instruments and their missionary society and walked a new course. The battles had been long, treacherous, costly and bitter. Many brethren, still licking their wounds, looked to the future to start all over again" (*The Search for the Ancient Order*, Vol. 2, p. 448). There was little communication, let alone cooperation, between the two groups.

Early efforts to heal the wounds of division

One early effort to heal wounds and mend fences was the establishment of the World Convention of Churches of Christ in 1930. Because it was begun and maintained primarily by the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ have not participated until recent years. The purpose of the convention was (and still is) to provide a means for global fellowship among the separated streams of the Restoration Movement.

Beginning in 1933, however, efforts were made by concerned individuals in the new conservative Christian Churches and the a cappella Churches of Christ to get together

for prayer, study, worship, and fellowship. These efforts are chronicled in a paper I presented here at Pepperdine University May 6 & 7, 2004, "Don't Know Much About History: Reviewing 70 Years of *Rapprochement* Between A Cappella Churches of Christ and Conservative Christian Churches, 1933-2004." [You may download this paper by going to www.poeministries.org and clicking on "Lectures."]

Efforts at *rapprochement* ("the restoration of cordial relations") began in the summer of 1933 in Visalia, California, when William Jessup and Ernest Beam organized the first of several "Unity Rallies." The fact that about 1,000 brethren from both sides attended showed there was an interest in at least talking about the differences. These meetings continued, off and on, on the West Coast until Beam's death in 1957.

Back east, from 1937-1944 a series known as the "National Unity Meeting" were orchestrated by James DeForest Murch and Claude Witty. A well-prepared five-point plan for unity was put forth. Well-attended meetings were held in major cities like Detroit (1,500 in attendance), Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Akron, and Lexington. Prayer meetings were held at the graves of Campbell, Stone, and McGarvey. Murch and Witty also launched a journal, *Christian Unity Quarterly*, and a tract, "Christian Unity: Churches of Christ and Christian Churches."

Later endeavors to mend fences

Other unity meetings included the Hartford (IL) Forum (1957-1972), the Unity Forum (1966-1975, beginning and ending at Bethany, West Virginia), the Restoration Forum (1984-present), the Stone-Campbell Dialogue (1999-present, a three-stream effort), and Ministry Impact (2004-present, with special emphasis on joint church planting). Though not "unity meetings" per se, I would be remiss if I did not

mention the irenic efforts that Eddie DeVries and Jerry Rushford have made in building bridges between brethren through Nationwide Youth Roundup (1980-present) and the Pepperdine University Bible Lectures (1983-present).

Coverage of current events

So, what's *really* happening in 2006 between Churches of Christ and Christian Churches? In some areas of the United States, nothing is happening (and according to some, nothing positive *should* happen). In other areas, some good things are happening. In still other areas, including Canada, Australia, Africa and other parts of the world, some truly encouraging things are happening.

Because this year marks the one hundredth anniversary of the 1906 census, several journals in the Stone-Campbell Movement are covering the story. In January 2006, the Winter issue of *One Body* carried Douglas A. Foster's "1906 – A Play in One Act." The dialogue is based on written accounts that appeared in the 1907 and 1908 issues of the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian-Evangelist*. The banner of my monthly newsletter, *The Knowlesletter*, is "2006, a Year of Healing, a Harbinger of Hope," and each issue carries encouraging reports from around the nation. *Gospel Advocate* devoted their entire January 2006 issue to the 1906 division, and has continued to cover the story in nearly every succeeding issue. The February 2006 edition of *The Christian Chronicle* ran a front page spread on the 1906 division as well as a four-page pullout section, "One hundred years later, can we converse across the keyboard?" Subsequent issues of the *Chronicle* have covered major unity events at Abilene and Tulsa. *Christian Standard* devoted their entire February 5 weekly to the June 27-30 North American Christian Convention in Louisville, billed as a "family reunion" between Christian Churches and Churches of Christ. Nearly every issue promotes the upcoming NACC. *New Wineskins*, now an online magazine, is devoting the entire year to the subject of unity. World Christian (produced by the *World Convention*) promotes every effort to build fellowship and understanding. To this date, however, I have seen nothing (though I may have missed it) on the 1906 break between Churches of Christ and Disciples of Christ in *DisciplesWorld* or any other Disciple publication. Nor have I seen any mention in other significant publications of Churches of Christ or Christians Churches for that matter.

Proactive current events that are promoting unity

Events that are taking a proactive approach to the 1906 division and 2006 unity effort began February 19-22 with Abilene Christian University's 88th Annual Lectureship. [ACU was established in 1906, so this was their Centennial year.] History was made on opening night when Dr. Royce Money, President of ACU, invited Dr. Don Jeanes, President of Milligan College, to deliver the main body of the opening lecture. Money, referencing the 1906 split, said, "For those of us in the Restoration Movement heritage, I doubt that many have looked at us in the last 100 years and said, 'Behold, how they love one another.' But we're going to do better in the next 100 years; we're going to do better right now. ...Unity for the sake of mission is essential if we are to successfully carry the light of Jesus into a dark world." The ACU Lectureship also hosted Restoration Forum XXIV. An estimated 750 people of the 3,000 who attended the lectures attended one or more of the 13 Forum sessions which featured three days of team-teaching by Rick Atchley and Bob Russell. The dates of the ACU Lectures were the same as the annual Preaching and Teaching Convention at Ozark Christian College in Joplin, Missouri, where Rubel Shelly was an invited keynote speaker. Shelly had previously appeared (February 11) on the campus of Johnson Bible College in Knoxville, Tennessee, where he participated in a "Unity Celebration" that included an "extension of the right hand of fellowship" service.

History was made again March 23-25 at the 31st Annual International Soul Winning Workshop in Tulsa when each of the three evening main sessions featured "tag-team" preaching by speakers from both fellowships. Tulsa has featured workshop leaders from Christian Churches in the past, but had never included them, until this year, in the main sessions. A pavilion packed with 6,500 people heard Bob Russell and Max Lucado speak on Thursday evening. On March 30 an Associated Press report datelined Tulsa hit the wires, "Churches talk about healing century-old split." [The AP wire story will be published in its entirety in *One Body* Summer 2006.] The story closed with a quote from Wade Hodges, director of the ISWW. "We can be unified building houses together, drilling water wells in Africa together, doing something with an AIDS clinic in Africa. I think that's more powerful unity than saying, 'We got you to sing with an instrument or lay down your instruments!'"

April 3-5 featured a Stone-Campbell Symposium on the campus of Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. Featured speakers were the three editors of *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*: Douglas A. Foster, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams.

Director Jerry Rushford has always been intentional in his inclusion of speakers from Christian Churches at the Pepperdine University Bible Lectures. This year at least 12 will be teaching classes. Some of my material will be taken from my new book *Together in Christ: More Than a Dream*. Rick Atchley and Bob Russell are team-teaching material from their new book *Together Again: Restoring Unity in Christ after a Century of Separation*. The 2006 theme is especially appropriate: "Life Together: The Heart of Love and Fellowship." President Andrew Benton has always been welcoming and affirming to all that attend and participate in this enriching event. Every time I see the lighted 125-foot Phillips Theme Tower, boldly displaying the cross of Christ, I am reminded that 2,000 years ago Christ made us one body at the foot of His cross.

The biggest event planned for 2006 is the June 27-30 North American Christian Convention in Louisville. Three years ago Rick Atchley visited the NACC in Indianapolis and spoke to a crowd of 8,500 people. "I believe with all my heart, in my lifetime we can have a family reunion." That's how this year's convention is being billed, "an epic event, an unforgettable family reunion." President David Faust said, "One of the largest gatherings in the history of our movement will occur in Louisville on June 27-30, 2006. The 2006 NACC will provide an unprecedented opportunity to reach out to one another in brotherly love. We will celebrate our common heritage and faith. And we will ask the Lord to heal our divisions and help us achieve our common goal of reaching a lost world for Christ. *Christian Standard* and *The Christian Chronicle* are co-sponsoring a pre-convention trip to Cane Ridge. The four main sessions will feature eight speakers, four from each fellowship of churches. More than 40 speakers from Churches of Christ will teach classes. Three members of Churches of Christ have been serving on the 16-person Executive Committee to help plan the gathering. It is hoped that more than 10,000 people will attend. The theme is "Together in Christ."

Another event that will take place in Louisville is the 59th Annual Kentucky-Indiana Christian Fellowship Week,

August 7-10. August 8 has been set aside as "A Day of Reconciliation," providing opportunities for church leaders and congregations to offer/seek forgiveness for past hurts within the church. I will be speaking three times at this gathering (day sessions in Louisville, night sessions in Sellersburg, Indiana).

New books on the division and efforts to reconcile

Rick Atchley and Bob Russell have co-authored a book that has been the basis of their team-teaching at ACU, Tulsa, Pepperdine, and the NACC. It is called *Together Again: Restoring Unity in Christ after a Century of Separation* and was co-published by Standard Publishing and Leafwood Publishers.

Ben Brewster has written a book that deals specifically with the 1906 division: *Torn Asunder: The Civil War and the 1906 Division of the Disciples* (available from www.behindtherestoration.com). The foreword was written by Dr. James B. North of Cincinnati Christian University.

Other new releases focusing on Christian unity include my new book *Together in Christ: More Than a Dream*, co-published by College Press and Leafwood Publishers. The foreword was written by Dr. Jerry Rushford of Pepperdine University.

There are many fine books on unity produced as of late. Thomas A. Langford has written *On Common Ground at the Foot of the Cross: Essays on Unity* (Ketch Publishing, 2006). Jack R. Reese wrote *The Body Broken: Embracing the Peace of Christ in a Fragmented Church* (ACU Press, 2005). Gene Shelburne authored *The Quest for Unity: An Appeal for Oneness Among All Believers in Christ* (Leafwood Publishers, 2004). Sam E. Stone, former editor of *Christian Standard*, wrote *Simply Christians: New Testament Christianity in the 21st Century* (College Press, 2004). Rubel Shelly and John O. York co-authored *The Jesus Proposal: A Theological Framework for Maintaining the Unity of the Body of Christ* (Leafwood Publishers, 2003).

101 ways we are serving God together in 2006

A missionary in Haiti who is now living in the United States was asked in *The Christian Chronicle* (May 2006)

if instrumental and a cappella churches could cooperate in missions. He replied, "If we can't work together in this country, why should we think we can do so in some other one?" I kindly beg to differ! The man who says it can't be done is often interrupted by someone who is doing what was said could not be done! Rick Atchley's remarks at the 2003 NACC were prophetic: "For a hundred years we have served God apart ... only God knows what we can do the next hundred years serving Him together." This section of my paper will chronicle 101 things being done together (not just theory), and many of these things have been done together for many years.

1. Two people praying together for unity. Jesus promises to be with us. It's what He prayed for (John 17)!
2. Attending each other's prayer meetings or small group meetings where prayer is emphasized.
3. Five Restoration churches in Lubbock, Texas participated in a 24-hour prayer vigil before Restoration Forum XXII in 2002.
4. The 2006 NACC has for the first time named co-chairmen for the prayer committee – one from each fellowship.
5. Harvest Prayer Ministries and the Calhoun (LA) School of Prayer have been cooperating in prayer retreats.
6. Citywide prayer meetings for unity and harmony are happening.
7. Doing prayer walks in your city together.
8. Local prayer breakfasts on a weekly or monthly basis.
9. Prayer retreats are taking place with folks from both fellowships in attendance.
10. Participating in the National Day of Prayer.
11. Serving on the Presidential Prayer Team.
12. Seeing the New Year in by "praying in the New Year" together.
13. Reading and studying Scripture together in homes or restaurants.
14. Distributing Bibles together in overseas campaigns or USA prison ministries.
15. Being a teacher in World Bible School or International Bible School.
16. The new president of Pioneer Bible Translators in from the a cappella churches.
17. Doing Bible translation together.
18. Studying biblical topics together [The Singing School at ACU will study everything the Bible says about music July 14-15]
19. Participating in the same daily Bible reading program where we are all on the same page (literally).
20. Preaching the same text the same Sunday. Then we are all "speaking the same thing."
21. Local pulpit exchanges are happening and members are being enriched.
22. Preaching for each other's revival meetings/gospel meetings.
23. Preaching Christ together in joint short-term mission endeavors.
24. The National Preaching Summit features the best preachers from both fellowships.
25. Listening to tapes, CDs, or DVDs of the best preachers in both groups.
26. Local preachers are meeting together to study and prepare their weekly sermons.
27. Weekly or monthly preachers' meetings, sharing devotions and information.
28. Churches worshipping together on special days, Sunday evenings, and 5th Sunday gatherings.
29. Visiting each other's revival/gospel meetings, seminars, or special events.
30. Hosting seminars for elders or leaders from both sides.
31. Hosting a luncheon for area preachers. [Southern Acres Christian Church in Lexington, KY had 75 show up when I spoke there a few years ago]
32. Hosting a Restoration Heritage Day where our common heritage is featured.
33. Taking trips together to Restoration sites such as Cane Ridge and Bethany.
34. Surveying what we have in common. We agree on more than you think!
35. Encouraging members who move to cities where there is no church of your persuasion to place membership in a sister Restoration church.
36. Former members are being accepted and placed in positions of leadership.
37. Visiting each other's colleges and universities.
38. Sending your children to each other's colleges/universities. [We sent a daughter to Harding University]
39. Visiting the many parachurch ministries and agencies in each fellowship. There are thousands of them! A good amount of our support comes from a cappella brethren.
40. Conducting a joint Vacation Bible School.

41. Cooperating in hospital visitation and nursing home services.
42. Attending each other's church retreats.
43. Churches opening their buildings to another congregation when they are rebuilding or have suffered the loss of their building.
44. Joint observance of the Lord's Supper with elders from both churches presiding.
45. Enjoying food functions together. Churches that picnic will not nit-pick!
46. Individuals are regularly going to coffee or lunch together for fellowship.
47. Sharing leadership for one another's small groups or special seminars.
48. Working together in community service projects.
49. Working together in a crisis pregnancy center.
50. Joining forces in building a house or doing house repair for someone.
51. Teaming up to take a united stand against moral and social evils like pornography, racism or gambling in your community.
52. Cooperating in an AIDS initiative. [Back in 1990 Prentice Meador aired a two-hour live broadcast "The Churches Response to AIDS" from GNPI studios via satellite]
53. Starting a CUP ministry (Christians United Pantry). Three Restoration churches started this ministry several years ago in Springdale, AR and it is still growing.
54. Joining together in Disaster Relief projects. Peace on Earth Ministries' appeal for victims of Hurricane Katrina was equally divided between relief agencies of Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. Members of both fellowships worked side by side in the stricken South.
55. Receiving joint offerings that can be shared with a mutual project locally.
56. Joint youth activities and service projects. They are already ahead of us in many ways and have no desire to fight the battles of the past.
57. Shared Christian campus ministries and activities. Joel Solliday, a Pepperdine grad, edits Campus Crosswalk. The latest issue is all about unity. www.campuscrosswalk.org.
58. World Wide Youth Camps now has an opportunity to minister in 700 former Pioneer Youth Camps in Russia/Ukraine and ministries from both fellowships are joining them in this unprecedented opportunity. www.wwyc.org.
59. Multiplied thousands are attending Christ in Youth conferences. www.ciy.com.
60. The group ACAPPELLA provided the sound track for GNPI's most popular video, "Everybody Needs Jesus."
61. Some Christian colleges and universities are doing joint faculty retreats.
62. The president of ACU invited the president of Milligan College to deliver the main body of the opening lecture at this year's ACU Lectureship.
63. Presidents of colleges and universities from both constituencies met at William Jessup University this year.
64. Several colleges and universities intentionally have faculty members, adjunct professors, and guest chapel speakers from the other fellowship.
65. Many people send financial support to colleges and universities not of their background.
66. Christian university lectureships have been including speakers from Christian Churches for years.
67. Conventions like the North American Christian Convention and National Missionary Convention have been including speakers from Churches of Christ for years.
68. Family Camps like the Hillsboro (OH) Family Camp have done the same. Family Camps in Canada have done so for many years.
69. Thousands from both fellowships are planning to attend this year's "family reunion" at the NACC in Louisville, KY. www.nacctheconnectingplace.org
70. Since 1984 thousands have attended the Restoration Forum. More than 300 people signed a "Covenant of Unity" in 2002. See at www.poeministries.org Click on "Restoration Forum."
71. Since 2002 the Forum has been "honoring one another" with the Honor Roll of Unity. See at www.poeministries.org Click on "Restoration Forum."
72. A recent service at Raintree Christian Church in Lubbock, TX (attended by members of six a cappella churches) honored men from both fellowships for their 40 years of promoting unity in Lubbock.
73. The Stone-Campbell Dialogue, begun in 1999, continues. At one meeting they produced a "Confession of Sin." Local churches have done likewise.
74. Congregations too numerous to mention have merged and become "one body."

75. Cooperative church plants are taking place with instrumental churches planting a cappella churches and vice versa.
76. Some a cappella churches are now partnering with STADIA to plant churches together. Go to www.stadia.cc
77. Megachurch leaders in the Christian Churches invited megachurch leaders from the Churches of Christ to join them in their annual meeting this year.
78. Restoration churches in Lexington, KY partnered to plant and support a new Hispanic congregation.
79. Four a cappella and instrumental churches and two parachurch ministries from two provinces in Canada are birthing a new church in September 2006.
80. College Press continues to produce the NIV Commentary co-edited and written by scholars from both fellowships.
81. Standard Publishing and Leafwood Publishers have just co-published a new book by Rick Atchley and Bob Russell, *Together Again*.
82. College Press and Leafwood Publishers have just co-published my new book, *Together in Christ*.
83. Standard Publishing has just released *Unleashing the Potential of the Smaller Church* that features articles from 12 preachers, six from each fellowship.
84. Journals like *Christian Standard*, *The Lookout*, *One Body*, *Leaven*, *New Wineskins*, *Word and Work*, *Stone-Campbell Journal* and others regularly and intentionally publish writers from both fellowships. *The Christian Chronicle* has published interviews with leaders from both fellowships.
85. Some journals are now providing online editions free for readers.
86. Many people are adding Restoration online magazines, websites, and blogs to their "My Favorites" list on their computers.
87. More than 300 writers from the Stone-Campbell Movement contributed articles for the 900-page volume, *The Stone-Campbell Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans, 2004).
88. Young people are going on short-term mission trips together.
89. Older people are doing the same or giving so the young may go.
90. For many years our missionaries, the real heroes of the church, have been quietly but efficiently working together in the trenches where spiritual darkness abounds.
91. They are ministering together to refugees from war in the name of Christ.
92. They are cooperating in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.
93. They are ministering together to orphans and widows in their affliction.
94. They are ministering together to those dying of AIDS.
95. They are joining forces to train new leadership for churches.
96. They are working together to provide technology to spread the gospel. Go to www.gnpi.org. GNPI is now reaching more than 6 million people a day and has just launched a "Media Challenge" designed to train 1,000 young people in designing videos to reach their own generation.
97. They are baptizing disciples and planting churches together.
98. They are cooperating with mutual internship programs.
99. They are doing new field research together.
100. They are visioning together for a new Christian university in East Africa that will provide holistic vocational training for Christians.
101. Ten percent of the offering received at this year's NACC will go to an AIDS treatment center in Kenya that is a cooperative effort of both Churches of Christ and Christian Churches.

Conclusion

A missionary in South Africa is quoted in the May 2006 issue of *The Christian Chronicle*. "When you are dodging Muslim bullets, cradling starving babies, comforting a malaria-ridden brother, all the nonsense over plucking on a piano seems to pale in comparison." In his address "A Legacy of Unity" delivered at a session of Restoration Forum XXIV in Abilene, February 22, 2006, Ziden Nutt shared several letters he received from missionaries who were responding to a recent global survey of what missionaries were doing together. A missionary in Thailand replied, "Your questions are foreign to me. We've always worked together. A missionary in Kenya wrote, "My mother remembered when her church in West Virginia split over the instrument. Both groups continued to share the same building and the same coal shed,

but divided the coal. The youth group of which she was a part wrote on the coal shed, 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, and TWO coal piles.'" The missionary concluded, "I'm just so happy that I had the privilege to work in the atmosphere of ONE coal pile, and rejoice that my generation of church leaders is wiping off the graffiti on the coal shed."

In my book *Together in Christ: More Than a Dream* I close with the story of two courageous men who were aboard United Flight 93 on September 11, 2001. One was Thomas E. Burnett, Jr., a graduate of Pepperdine University. The other was Todd Beamer, whose father is an elder in one of our Christian Churches. I wrote, "These brave souls came together in a selfless, redemptive manner. No one asked what denomination they belonged to or what another believed or practiced. The crisis was too great. Time was of essence. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we who call ourselves Christians could unite in an equally selfless, redemptive

manner to save those who have been hijacked by Satan and are hurtling for eternal doom?"

My editorial for the Summer 2006 edition of *One Body* is already written. It is called "The Bottom Line." I close with these words. "The bottom line calls for us to accept one another and strive together for the faith until we are caught up together in the clouds to live together forever with the Christ who brought us together at the Cross. Time is too short, eternity is too long, souls are too precious, hell is too awful, and heaven is too good to ignore the bottom line."

After a century of separation it appears that those who want to see Jesus' prayer for unity fulfilled in their lifetime are restoring family ties. May God bless all to "go thou and do likewise." Together in Christ let us serve Him in the few days we have left on this sin-cursed, war-torn, Christ-needy planet.

VICTOR KNOWLES is Founder and President of Peace on Earth Ministries (POEM), P. O. Box 275, Joplin, MO 64802-0275. He also serves as Editor of *One Body* magazine, helps coordinate the Restoration Forum, and has authored several books including *Together in Christ: More Than a Dream* (a 2006 co-release of College Press and Leafwood Publishers). Website: www.poeministries.org